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The library in the economy
of the state

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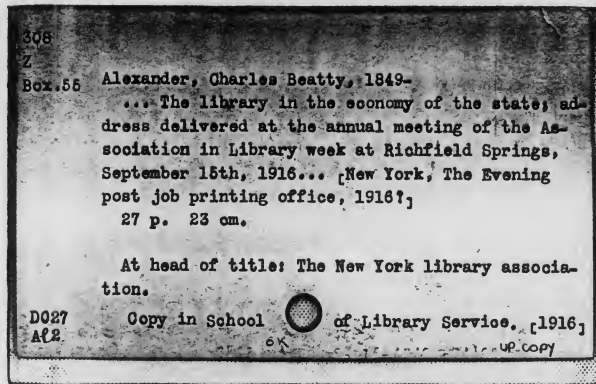
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The New York Library Association

The Library in the Economy of the State

Address delivered at the Annual Meeting of the
Association in Library Week at Richfield Springs
September 15th, 1916

BY

CHARLES BEATTY ALEXANDER, LL.D., Litt.D.

a Regent of the University of the
State of New York

Permit me to thank you for the honor you have done me in asking me to participate in your deliberations. I recognize the fact that you have invited me to be here, not only because I am a Regent of the University of the State of New York, but because I have been a member of its Library Committee during the recent fruitful years, in which the State Library has risen from its ashes to become one of the great libraries of the nation.

It is a matter of regret to me and a subject of condolence to you that you have not in my place the cultured and delightful Chairman of that Committee, the Honorable Chester S. Lord, LL.D., whose fine career as a journalist, and whose high pursuit of letters have made him an inspiration to his colleagues, and I am sure also to those learned and accomplished men who serve the State in its library activities, who have been unremitting in their devotion to their great work.

To me the association with him and with them has been a liberal education, and I cannot appear here in a convention of librarians without acknowledging my personal debt to them. I allude particularly to the Director of the State Library, James L. Wyer, Jr., M. L. S., and to Frank K. Walter, M. A., M. L. S., of the State Library School.

The New York Library Association has the distinction of being the first state association actually organized for the discussion of library questions, and the furtherance of library work. Not only is it the oldest but it has the added distinction of being the most widely known of the state associations. Its annual meeting, popularly known as "Library week," is second in interest and attendance only to the meetings of the national body, the American Library Association. In its membership, communities of all sizes and types are represented, from the hamlet to

the metropolis. Librarians from public libraries, from schools and colleges, and from libraries devoted to very special lines of work, mingle in its meetings to discuss the matters common to their diverse fields. Perhaps no similar body has so close or so cordial relations with the official educational activities of its state, and none has more independence of action or freedom in comment on these state activities. In the carefully planned system of library institutes which it conducts, with the cooperation of the library divisions of the state's educational department, it has gained for itself another claim to be included among the great constructive educational forces of the state.

In view of the closeness of these relations, it is not inappropriate to make a brief return to somewhat familiar ground, and to review some of the reasons which have led the State of New York to consider libraries a part of its educational system, to expect from them direct educational results, and to encourage their establishment throughout the state for the use of the public at public expense.

There is, in general, an inborn reverence for learning. Whether this be an evidence of an innate longing for a higher phase of individual and race development, or a traditional folk feeling still imposed upon us by centuries of subordination to social caste, is a matter for the psychologist or the anthropologist to decide. Enough for us at present that it exists as a real force in our social structure. It is, therefore, natural that the extension of education, aside from the utilitarian phases needed for bare existence, should have followed the growth of democracy. Among the Egyptians with their highly developed caste system, which included even a caste of hereditary, registered thieves, education was monopolized by the priests; in India to-day it is the Brahmin who feels

himself both the natural source and receptacle of education, and it is to the extension of education that the opponents of the caste system look with greatest hope.

In Greece we seem to see an exception, but it is noteworthy, that such general education as the Grecians had, reached its highest development in democratic Athens. But even in Athens the state had little concern with the schools. "The State never thought of erecting public institutions to be maintained at the general expense. The sort of an education the children received depended mainly on the parents' own conscientiousness; some got none at all".*

Education was necessarily too expensive for the poorer classes. The schools of philosophy, too, though well fitted to educate the wealthy, and those of exceptional ability, only increased the real class distinctions in the apparent democracy. Athenian democracy failed, largely because of the lack of a general educational system to harmonize the social ideas of its different strata.†

As the warrior began to gain ascendancy, and the nobility, under whatever name it was recognized, began to take its place beside the priest and even to dominate him, it was natural that the ruling class should insist on being admitted also to the real and fancied advantages of education. In many cases, both classes were combined and the warrior-priest kept the same monopoly the priest had previously enjoyed. In Assyria there were temple schools and palace schools. The Spartans, who carried military education and preparedness to a point undreamed of in the wildest fancy of to-day, carefully excluded two of its recognized social castes, from the excessive military training required of the fully qualified Spartan.

* Becker. *Charicles*, tr. by F. Metcalf, 6th ed., pp. 227-28.

† Grote. *History of Greece*. Chap. 16, *passim*; also Compayre, *G. History of Pedagogy*. 1882, p. 40.

In medieval times there were two roads to education. The one, open only to sons of gentlemen or those of higher rank, was strictly vocational, and consisted of service first as a page, then as an esquire, in the castle of some other noble; the other, through the door of the church,* led through the monastery school either to service in the church itself or to some position in the state. These monastery schools were fed by more elementary schools for the laity in which instruction was often gratuitously given.† Despite the great good done by these schools, they were only a partial solution of the problem, and education never became even approximately general as long as it was a matter of charitable enterprise or private philanthropy, rather than a duty which the state owed itself in the preparation of every citizen.

As long as the English suffrage remained in the hands of a few, the so-called "public schools" like Rugby and Harrow and Eton, and the Universities, dominated by the gentry, seemed to be fairly adequate, when supplemented by local parish schools, and those supported by private enterprise. However much the university man may scorn the "board school", open to all and supported by public funds, and however glaring its deficiencies may be, it has become more and more a necessity as English democracy has increased.‡

It sometimes surprises one to remember that free public education is scarcely more than a century old in New York State and, in many parts of the country, of even more recent date. Compulsory education, which is the logical outcome of the idea that education is necessary, not merely desirable, in a state in whose government all have a share, is of much later enactment and is not yet accepted gratefully by many who are its chief beneficiaries.

* Hallam, H. *Europe during the middle ages*. Chap. IX.

† Buckingham, L. A. *Bible in the middle ages*. 1853, p. 171.

‡ Chancellor Whitelaw Reid. *Education in England*, 1907, pp. 3-4.

The wonderful development of systems of elementary schools, dealing with immature pupils whose education must necessarily be chiefly received through direct instruction, has sometimes made teacher and public alike forget in practice what has always been accepted in theory, namely, that education is a process of which direct instruction is only a part. The school has been emphasized; the library, the museum and other sources of education have often been neglected.

That libraries and schools have been associated so closely, throughout the ages, is so often forgotten that a summary of some historical facts regarding library development may not be inappropriate in a conference of librarians.

The beginning of libraries lies so far back in the shadows of antiquity that one cannot with certainty say where or how they began or when the votive offering or the ceremonial object inscribed with mystic symbols gave place to the more formal written record of religious formula, or of kingly prowess. There are reasons for believing that at first the library, like writing, was confined to the priestly class.*

* In primitive communities the priest or holy man would naturally be the first to lay claim to knowledge other than that necessary to sustain life. He would teach, and would find it necessary to transmit his teaching, either to the memory of his elected successor, or by recording it after the invention of written signs. Only a priest, probably, would be competent to record the deed of chieftains and kings; and much evidence might be adduced showing that in very early times priests did compile such annals. Hence we might expect the earliest libraries to comprise only records of ecclesiastical mysteries or religious doctrines, and of historic events, preserved in or near sanctuaries. The evidence bears out this expectation very consistently. Moses, we are told, was directed to preserve the divine law in the ark. In ancient Egypt libraries were attached to temples. Diodorus of Sicily tells us how Egyptian priests "had in their sacred books, transmitted from the the Romans records were preserved in temples; the Greeks, we are told, "preserved the oldest time written descriptions of all their kings". Among the Assyrians the principal library is stored in the Lamaist temple. Among the Aztecs the highest ranks of the priesthood kept the State and other archives; and their manuscripts were evidently associated with their religion, because the Spanish conquerors collected all they could lay hands upon and burned them as magic scrolls, "symbols of a pestilent superstition". Savage, E. A. *Story of libraries*. P. 1, et seq.

In very early times, and in much later times among primitive peoples, even the art of writing itself was often kept a secret mystery in the custody of priests. The name "hieroglyphics" points in this same direction, and the temple collections of sacred books, the so-called books of Thoth and books of Hermes, point in the same direction. Richardson, E. C. *Beginning of libraries*. p. 143.

So valuable a thing as writing, and the extension of memory by the written word could not long remain the possession of any one class, and very early the temple library and the royal library existed either side by side or merged into one.*

When the Jews invaded Canaan, one of the cities they took was Kirjath Sepher, a name which has commonly been interpreted "the City of Books". Though some critics attack the accuracy of this meaning, there is good ground for believing that this early biblical reference really means that libraries existed in remote biblical times.†

In the ruins of Nineveh and of Knossos in Crete remains of libraries exist in connection with royal palaces. The tyrants of Greece, the Ptolemies at Alexandria, the kings of Pergamun, and Augustus and his successors at Rome were noted for the zeal with which they founded and maintained libraries. So well known as book-collectors did many of the emperors become that sycophants often sought to win their favor by pretending also a zeal for book collection. Lucian in his "Remarks addressed to an illiterate book-fancier" satirizes this tendency as follows:

"The cause of your bibliomania is clear enough; I must have been dozing or I should have seen it long ago. This is your idea of strategy; you know the Emperor's scholarly tastes, and his respect for culture, and you think

* "At one time we looked upon the two Ramnassesean libraries mentioned by Diodorus as the earliest examples of such institutions. If, indeed, they were not fabulous. Now we have indisputable evidence of libraries at a much earlier date. While excavating among the mounds of the Babylonian city of Nippur, Professor Hilprecht, an American scholar, exposed a series of rooms in which were stored neatly upon shelves of unbaked clay, about 25,000 clay tablets forming part of the temple library during the latter half of the third millennium B. C. The library was either wholly or partly an adjunct to the temple school." Savage, E. A. *Story of Libraries*, p. 2, et seq.

† Hastings. *Dictionary of the Bible* (see Kirjath Sepher); Richardson, E. C. *Public Libraries*, p. 88; Sayce, A. H. *Higher criticism and the monuments*, p. 54; also, Hastings, op. cit. under Debir.

it will be worth something to you if he hears of your literary pursuits. Once let your name be mentioned to him as a great buyer and collector of books, and you reckon that your fortune is made."*

Though there is evidence that many of these libraries were free, with a rather high type of organization, their use was largely confined to the nobles, or at least the gentry or leisure class. The making of books was chiefly in the hands of the learned men, whom the accidents of war had made slaves.

The plebian or alien slave, however, though exalted by a turn of fortune to the place of the patrician, did not feel much sympathy for institutions not essentially plebian in character. The imperial libraries, and the private collections of wealthy citizens appealed to the unpolished barbarian as little as a futurist picture or *vers libre* appeal to a cottager whose ideas of art are bounded by a "crayon enlargement" or who considers Will Carleton the greatest American poet. It was as inevitable that the barbarian invasions should mean the extinction of the great libraries, as that the introduction of Roman culture into Egypt had meant, as regrettable results of military tactics, the destruction of the great Alexandrian libraries.

Since the Christian church was the one cohesive force of the early centuries of the Christian era, it is not surprising that its monasteries became the refuge of such collections of books as had survived either in original or in copy.

The monasteries, without the libraries of imperial Rome, would have been chiefly theological libraries or

* Lucian. *Works*, trans. by Fowler. Oxford, 1905; vol. 3, p. 275. *Πρὸς τοὺς ἀναίδεοντο καὶ πολλὰ βιβλία ἀνοίμενον*. § 22.

Savage. Chap. I, *passim*.

Boyd, E. E. *Public libraries and literary culture in ancient Rome*. 1916, *passim*.

books of devotion, unredeemed by much literature of great merit, other than that of the Bible.

As it was, sacred and profane mingled in the *scriptoria* and on the shelves of the monastery library. To many a monk, Virgil and Homer were more familiar than the Hebrew Prophets. Though from many parchments the Greek and Latin classic was erased to make room for the homily or the discussion of some theological point, the taste of the cleric in many cases overcame his ecclesiastical scruples, and the profane literature remained. It could not be otherwise in times when Aristotle, Plato and Pliny were considered authorities, when Virgil was placed just outside the gates of heaven, and when Seneca and Socrates were constantly cited on ethical points by the Christian fathers.

The cheap slave labor which had made possible the large collections of the Romans was no longer available.* The careful, elaborate text of the cloister, the beautiful illuminations, made reproduction of books a slow and costly process. Constant fighting fostered by the absence of strong states, made the ruling classes quite indifferent to learning. Charlemagne and Alfred were exceptions in their zeal to promote literature, but it is said that even Charlemagne never learned to write. The average noble desisted the learning of the clerk.

During the ages when schools were all but nonexistent, it was the library of the monastery which kept alive such learning as there was, and which paved the way for the remarkable rise and development of the medieval university. The earliest universities were student groups brought together by the fame of some great scholar like

* "It is believed by modern scholars that books were by no means rare in Rome among the well-to-do classes and must usually have sold at very moderate prices; and that books in the early days of the Empire probably cost less than books at the present time containing an equal amount of subject-matter. This was made possible through the exceedingly cheap labor rendered by numerous slaves of high intelligence." Deane, *op. cit.*, p. 62.

Alcuin of York, Lanfranc of Pavia, Anselm, William of Champeaux or Abelard.*

It is interesting to note that at the University of Paris in the 14th century there were scores of scribes, booksellers, parchment makers, binders, etc., all under the control of the university, who, by their combined efforts supplied in part the lack of books available for consultation in the university library. St. Benedict in the 6th century formulated his famous rule "*Of daily manual labor*" in which he enjoined daily reading of books from the monastery library.†

This rule, based on the earlier one of Augustine, was adopted either in its entirety or with slight modifications, by all the Benedictine monasteries and by many others. To provide the books for reading it became necessary to establish libraries.‡

* "In the medieval period diverse opinions in the great field of theology were a source of disturbance that often proved most painful and serious. And this diversity was the result of ignorance on the part of great numbers of the clergy. Paganism, pantheism, materialism, and other 'isms' bred or imported, were in perpetual conflict. Heresies abounded. Even the sacred orders within the church could not always understand the Scriptures exactly alike. There must needs be enlightenment on the one hand or suppression on the other, if the church would avoid the trials and periods of perpetual conflict. The printing press had not yet come, and the making of manuscript copies by the thousand was tedious and unsatisfactory. A common center or centers, where the living teacher could in person present, explain and reinforce or overthrow the resurrected Grecian or any other philosophy whatsoever that had been or might be offered, was a necessity." Hoyt, J. W. University of Paris during the middle ages. In Report of the U. S. Commissioner of Education for 1904, pp. 522-23.

† "Idleness is the enemy of the soul; hence brethren ought, at certain seasons, to occupy themselves with manual labour, and again, at certain hours, with holy reading."

Between Easter and the calends of October let them apply themselves to reading the fourth hour till near the sixth hour. After the sixth hour, when they rise from table, let them rest on their beds in complete silence; or, if any one should wish to read to himself, let him do so in such a way as not to disturb any one else.

From the calends of October to the Beginning of Lent let them apply themselves to reading until the second hour. During Lent, let them apply themselves to reading from morning until the end of the third hour. . . . and, in these days of Lent, let them receive a book apiece from the library, and read it straight through. These books are to be given out at the beginning of Lent. It is important that one or two seniors should be appointed to go round the monastery at the hours when brethren are engaged in reading, in case some ill-conditioned brother should be giving himself up to sloth or idle talk. Instead of reading steadily; so that not only is he useless to himself, but incites others to do wrong." Quoted by Clark, J. W. Libraries in the medieval and renaissance periods. 1894, p. 14.

‡ "We may fairly conclude that by the end of the eleventh century Benedictine houses possessed two sets of books: (1) those which were distributed among the brethren; (2) those which were kept in some safe place, probably the church, as part of the valuables of the House; or, to adopt modern phrases, they had a lending library and a library of reference. The Augustinians go a step farther

Even earlier the Irish monks had made their monasteries centers of literary study to which students came from the whole civilized world and from which monks went to Scotland, France and to St. Gall on the Isle of Constance carrying with them not only a zeal for Christianity but the knowledge of the classics.*

Thus the monastery with its library, its facilities for study and its almost complete monopoly of learned men, easily became the precursor of the university. In many cases the libraries were large even when measured by comparatively modern standards. Even in the 10th century the Abbey of Novalise in Piedmont had 6,000 volumes.

The invention of printing, followed so closely by the revival of learning, multiplied not only books, but readers of books. The wandering scholar and the studious monk, freed from the necessity of copying the books they needed, or of buying them at a high price from scribes, felt more and more the desirability of going beyond the very few text-books which had formerly been deemed sufficient. Learning became secularized, and the university library grew, in proportion as the monastery library lessened, in

than the Benedictines and the Orders derived from them, for they prescribe the kind of press in which the books are to be kept. Both they and the Premonstratensians permit their books to be lent on the receipt of a pledge of sufficient value. Lastly, the Friars, though they were established on the principle of holding no possessions of any kind, some found that books were indispensable; that, in the words of a Norman Bishop, *Claustium sine armario, castreum sine armentario* (A cloister without a library is a castle without an armory). So by a strange irony, it came to pass that their libraries excelled those of most other orders as Richard de Bury testifies in the *Philobiblon*.¹ Clark, *op. cit.*, pp. 18-19.

* "While the vigor of christianity in Italy, and Gaul and Spain was exhausted in a bare struggle for life, Ireland, which remained unscourged by invaders, drew from its conversion an energy such as it has never known since. . . . The science and biblical knowledge which fled from the Continent took refuge in its schools. . . . Irish missionaries labored among the Picts of the Highlands and among the Frisians of the northern seas. An Irish missionary, Columba, founded monasteries in Burgundy and the Apennines. The Canton of St. Gall still commemorates in its name another Irish missionary before whom the spirits of blood and fell fled waiting over the waters of the Lake of Constance." Green, J. R. *History of the English People*, § 49.

"Modern historians have at last appreciated the blaze of life, religions, literary and artistic, which was kindled by Christianity in the 'Isle of Saints', within a century after St. Patrick's coming (about A. D. 450); how the enthusiasm kindled by Christianity in the Celtic nature so far transcended the limits of the island, and indeed of Great Britain, that Irish missionaries and monks were soon found in the chief religious centres of Gaul, Germany, Switzerland and North Italy, while foreigners found their toilsome way to Ireland to learn Greek!" Madern, F. Books in manuscript. 1893, pp. 27-28.

importance. The religious wars of the 16th century destroyed many of the monastic libraries. In France 151 were pillaged; in England more than 700 monasteries or church schools were victims. Even the university libraries suffered, though in less degree, in the general social upheaval.*

The bright side to this dark picture is the fact that, in the general breaking down of the barriers set up by the clergy and by the professional classes, who had frequented the university schools of arts, medicine, theology and law, learning became more and more popularized, the reading of books more general and the formation of private collections of books more common. It is possible that the use of libraries, if it did not actually diminish, at least showed no large relative increase over that of the middle ages. Indeed there are indications that the medieval library rules were more liberal than those which often prevailed rather generally from the 16th to the early 19th century. One is accustomed to think of "the books in chains", but the chained books were available for all purposes, except for private acquisition, and were certainly more hospitable to the reader than the locked doors so common in American college libraries as late as the middle 19th century. I myself on visiting a remarkable collection of editions of Virgil in Oxford was informed that the undergraduates had no access to it. An Englishman, writing in 1853, bewails the loss of this medieval liberality. He says: "Since the Monastic Libraries, so thickly scattered throughout Europe in the Middle Ages, were, in the fullest sense of the term, Public Libraries, and placed their volumes within the reach of all who sought to peruse them, even at their own firesides, the price of books was a matter of far less importance than it would have been, had less extensive advantages

* Buckingham, L. A. Bible in the middle ages. 1853, pp. 155-62.

been offered, to those who desired to consecrate their leisure hours to intellectual pursuits; the student could pursue his toils, at some disadvantage, truly, but without serious obstacle, without possessing a library of his own, when the volumes which adorned the shelves of the Abbey were open to his access and might be carried to his house; in the facility with which he could obtain from the Monks the loan of valuable books, the scholar of those days enjoyed a privilege which is sought in vain by him who treads in his footsteps in the nineteenth century.*

It is interesting to note that, as has been indicated, both ancient and medieval scholars seem to have considered the library a necessary adjunct to education. Temple libraries flourished wherever the priestly class was dominant; the growth in monastery libraries kept pace with the growth in power and influence of the medieval church. Royal libraries, as at Rome, at the court of Charlemagne, and at Florence under the Medicis flourished when culture in general flourished. Whether feared as an arsenal of the black arts and destroyed by the superstitious as so many volumes were in the days of the reformation† or apostrophised as they, "Who alone are liberal and free, who give to all who ask of you and enfranchise all who serve you faithfully"‡ the book and the library were everywhere recognized as powers for weal or woe to the state. They were founded or supported by the state, by the church or the university all of which were public institutions. They were everywhere looked on as the source from which the scholar and the investigator could draw information. Nowhere did the private library take their place. Even the great book collectors in many

* Buckingham, L. A. *Op. cit.*, p. 162.

† "The books marked with red, were generally condemned at a venture for 'Popery', and where circles and mathematical figures were found, they were looked upon as compositions of magic, and either torn or burnt." Buckingham, *op. cit.*, p. 158.

‡ De Bury. *Philobiblon*, Chap. I, § 27.

cases, donated their collections to monasteries or to universities.

The Mazarin Library, the Bodleian, the Pepsyeon collection at Cambridge, were the forerunners of the Astor, the Lenox, and the Widener libraries of today.*

Few scholars had large collections. The great Mather library built up by several generations, does not fill even a very small room in the American Antiquarian Society at Worcester. The collections of Samuel Pepys, the work of a lifetime, fill only a few cases in the Magdalen College Library at Cambridge University.

Nevertheless the library was largely considered an optional workshop for the gifted few, and in later times became as much subordinated to the fixed curriculum of the schools of all grades, as was the case in the medieval school in which scarcity of books made a fixed course almost unavoidable.

The library of the average man before the last century was nearly negligible, judged by present notions. In the outfit sent by Patroon Van Rensselaer to Johannes Megapolensis, the first pastor of what is now the "Capitol district of New York State", was a library of 17 titles, in 25 volumes, for pastoral use.† The patroon apparently thought this quite sufficient in quantity as well as quality. In the inventory of an estate in colonial New York (May 6, 1613), 19 books, 18 pamphlets, 17 manuscript volumes and 11 pictures are mentioned. This was evidently a typical private library of the better class.‡

Despite the inadequacy of private collections, the fixed curricula of the school seem to have given a fictitious definiteness to education, which discouraged rather than encouraged the growth of libraries. In colonial America, the state was dominated by the clergy and the man of

* Buckingham, *op. cit.*, pp. 133-35.

† Ecclesiastical history of the State of N. Y., pp. 155-56.

‡ *Ibid.*, p. 168.

family. The library was largely considered the perquisite of the leaders of public opinion and not the continuation school for the self-culture of the multitude.

This deficiency was recognized by far-sighted men who began in the latter part of the 18th century, to establish society libraries, whose privileges were open to subscribers.

"The many-sided Franklin" had seen the need much earlier and in 1731 he founded the library of the Junto, a club which he had also founded as "a club of mutual improvement". In October, 1732, the library was opened for the use of the members. This afterward developed into The Library Company of Philadelphia, which still exists as the oldest, and one of the most flourishing subscription libraries still extant. Franklin says of this library, "This was the mother of all North American subscription libraries, now so numerous. These libraries have improved the general conversation of the Americans, made the common tradesmen and farmers as intelligent as most gentlemen from other countries, and perhaps have contributed in some degree to the stand so generally made throughout the colonies in defense of their privileges."^{*}

Those "practical" people who see in libraries an ornament rather than an organic part of education, a harmless civic amusement center rather than an institution whose claims to public support are based on public needs, will do well to remember this opinion of the eminently practical Franklin and to recall further that in his "*Proposals Relative to the Education of Youth in Pennsylvania*" written in 1749 he insists "That the house be furnished with a library if in the country (if in the town the town libraries will serve)."[†]

^{*} Franklin. *Autobiography*. Chap. V.

[†] Franklin. *Proposals relating to the Education of Youth in Pennsylvania*. Quoted in *Report of the U. S. Commission of Education*, 1902, v. 1, p. 183.

It is refreshing to note with what ease he solved the vexed question of the relationship of school and public library.

His attitude toward public library facilities is shown in another way:

"In 1784 a town in Norfolk County, Massachusetts, in its sixth year, took upon itself his name, and, sending notice of the honor, informed him that they would build a suitable tower to their church if he would present them with a bell. His famous reply asking them to accept a gift of books instead of a bell, 'sense being preferable to sound', led to the founding of a public library in the town".^{*}

Subscription libraries were founded in great numbers in his time and in the first half of the nineteenth century, in nearly all parts of the country. Though not free, in the modern sense of being supported by tax instead of by direct dues imposed on members, they were more nearly free and more nearly democratic, than their name indicates. They kept pace with the inadequate instructional advantages offered by the average school and opened the way for the later free tax-supported public library.[‡]

^{*} Thrope, F. N. *Franklin's Influence in American Education in Report of U. S. Commissioner of Education*, 1902, v. 1, p. 128.

TO RICHARD PRICE

DEAR FRIEND,

PASSY, March 18, 1785.

My nephew, Mr. Williams, will have the honor of delivering you this line. It is to request from you a List of a few good Books, to the Value of about Twenty-five Pounds, such as are most proper to uncultivate Principles of sound Religion and just Government. A New Town in the State of Massachusetts having done me the honors of naming itself after me, and proposing to build a Steeple to their meeting-house if I would give them a Bell, I have advic'd the sparing themselves the Expense of a Steeple for the present, and that they would accept of Books instead of a Bell, Sense being preferable to Sound. These are therefore intended as the Commencement of a little Parochial Library for the Use of a Society of intelligent, respectable Farmers, such as our Country People generally consist of

B. FRANKLIN.

In *Writings of Benjamin Franklin* collected by A. H. Smyth, 1906, v. 9, p. 300.

[‡] It is quite common to look upon the later movements by which libraries came to be supported by public funds derived from taxation as marking the beginning of the public library. In one sense this view is correct; but when it is noted how naturally and inevitable the public library of Franklin's institution has

Libraries of the present, are, therefore, a modernized rather than a purely modern institution. Their development is not so much a new contribution to education, as a remarkable enlargement of a field whose possibilities have heretofore been but partly recognized. They have three strong claims to respect: their present achievements, their promise for the future and their more than creditable past.

The schools and libraries of New York State followed the general course from education for the few to that provided for all.

Passing by the colonial period, we find the University of the State of New York founded in 1784 to supervise the Colleges of the State. In 1787 its field was enlarged to include the care of all schools of academic grade. The Regents themselves were not content with this limitation of educational facilities. In 1787 one of their committees reported that

"They feel themselves bound in faithfulness to add that the erecting of public schools for teaching reading, writing and arithmetic is an object of very great importance, which ought not to be left to the discretion of private men, but be promoted by public authority."*

The system of elementary schools, of which the state is justly proud, though repeatedly urged by the Regents, was established later and put under the care of a separate state department, where it remained until 1904, when the two departments were united. Neither the University nor the Department of Public Instruction were forgetful of

grown into the more recent form, it is easy to perceive that in the establishment of these subscription libraries, the public-library movement really began. From the first Niese institutions were for the benefit, not of the few, but of the many. . . . The very general application to such associations of names like "Young Men's Institute," implied that their members were not those of comparative leisure and ease of circumstances, but rather those who, unable to own books to any extent, must associate themselves in order to obtain their use. Fletcher, W. I. *Public libraries in America*, 1894, p. 11.

* Quoted in Hough, F. B. *Historical and statistical record of the University of the State of New York, 1784-1884*, p. 4-7.

the importance of libraries. From the first the Regents authorized the purchase from state funds of books and apparatus for school and college use. As early as 1839 each academy was required to have a library of at least \$150 in value. This requirement was gradually increased until to-day no state can show a better average stock of books in its high school libraries or better facilities for increasing the number of these books.

In 1818 the New York State Library was founded as "A public library for the use of the government and people of the State." In 1844 it passed into the control of the Regents. In 1845, the Regents became the trustees of the State Museum of Natural History, now a part of the Science Division of the University.

In 1834 the Department of Public Instruction took a very advanced step by authorizing the establishment of "district school libraries not primarily for school use, though kept in the school-house, but for all the inhabitants of the district." These were supported from state funds.*

Largely through lack of proper supervision and of competent librarians, these libraries fell so far short of their intended purpose, that in 1889 Dr. Draper, then State Superintendent of Public Instruction, urged provisions for the separate establishment of free tax-supported libraries, to be supervised by the Regents through the State Library. This led to excellent legislation in 1892, and to the remarkable growth of public libraries throughout the State. Of this period Dr. Draper remarks:

"The appointment of Melvil Dewey to the secretaryship of the Board of Regents and the directorship of the State Library in 1889 resulted speedily in much agitation

* While they were designated "school libraries", they were not chosen with reference to the work of the schools and they were open to the free use of all the people. They were commonly regarded as public libraries, administered through the school system for convenience." Draper, A. S. *Report of the N. Y. State Education Dep't.*, 1907, p. 619.

not only of library expansion but also of a much wider understanding of the adaptation of libraries to public and governmental uses as well as of much enlargement of library and librarian functions concerning both scientific study and the popular enlightenment.”*

The State has thus in large measure recognized the three leading aspects of education: (1) the direct instructional function of its schools of all kinds and grades; (2) the encouragement of scientific research as shown in the activities of the State Museum and of the State Historian; (3) the duty of the State to provide means for voluntary self-culture, intellectual recreation and professional and vocational improvement.

There is no danger that so important a feature of its work can ever be seriously neglected by the State.

Even at the risk of presenting nothing new, it is not out of place as a matter of state pride to refer briefly to some of the things which make the State conspicuous in library matters.

Allusion has already been made to the fact that the State Library from its inception was intended for state-wide service. Even yet, many states in their state libraries have not reached the place from which New York started a century ago. The remarkable recovery of the State Library from a disaster that might have been considered irremediable, the growth of its use not only within its own walls but throughout the State by means of inter-library loans, debate collections and package libraries are familiar items in current library history. More and more it is giving direct aid to state departments and to the legislature and becoming truly a library “for the people and the government of the state.”

In 1808 Napoleon Bonaparte had his own travelling camp library. Traveling parochial libraries were known

* Draper, A. S., *op. cit.*, p. 620.

almost as early in Scotland. For many years individual libraries and other institutions have been accustomed to lend small collections of books for limited periods. It remained for New York to adopt and adapt these plans and to make them of state-wide application. The growth of this service has been limited only by lack of funds to provide more material to send to applicants. There is no corner of the state in which some library or school, or isolated family or even some individual lover of reading, far from library facilities, has not been the beneficiary of this part of our library service.

The lives of many blind men and women have been cheered by the books in raised type which are so liberally provided for them. Many a perplexed librarian or private book-buyer has received much needed aid in the profitable purchase of books.

Through its library organizers and other officials, the state exercises a supervision over its libraries, similar to that which is transforming the schools of the state from an impressive aggregation of highly variable units, into a well-knit, state-wide system.

As early as 1827 state appropriations were made for the special training of teachers, and in 1844 the first normal school of the state was established. In the absence of any effective system of public libraries, the professional training of librarians was longer delayed, but in 1889, the Regents took under their jurisdiction the first library school, established at Columbia College two years before. Of this school the late Prof. Schwab of Yale has said: “I venture to say that no institution has ever made as relatively large a contribution toward uplifting and ennobling a learned profession.”* In this work three other similar schools have had a large part. With the schools at Albany, Pratt Institute, the New York Public Library

* *Proceedings. Dedication of the N. Y. State Education Building, 1907, p. 32.*

and Syracuse University, no other state is so amply provided with possibilities for training for library service.

The early establishment of school libraries has already been mentioned. Allusion has also been made to the practical failure of most of these libraries because of the lack of adequate management by the schools or adequate supervision by the state. Many school authorities who recognized the necessity of definite training in all other directions, seemed to assume that the ability to read intelligently and to choose books wisely was a heaven-born instinct and not what it really is, a faculty capable of improvement in all but an abnormal few. The average school library, in consequence, has not done its proper service. This state of affairs is rapidly changing. The School Libraries Division is bringing pressure to bear on school board and teacher to make the school library a part of the school that should be inspected as closely, and judged as rigidly, as any other part of the school work or equipment. The time is not far distant when the school librarian will be chosen for her special training and ability, and not with reference to the number of vacant class periods at her disposal.

The complexity of modern life has forced on every form of productive human activity the need of the library. Even to keep from dropping behind in the march of progress, it is necessary to use every bit of help available from the experience of others. The economic boundaries of a country are world-wide. Waste and inefficiency in any place affect the markets of a continent. No course of study in any school, whatever its rank, can be more than a beginning for necessary further study. The power of research, the desire for self-education, whether for utilitarian or for cultural purposes, are not merely things to be desired; they are fundamentals of national as of personal progress. The technical school,

and the industrial plant, have both their laboratory and their reference library. More slowly but none the less surely the truth is coming home to all thinking people, that the agencies for voluntary and informal education, and recreation, are no less essential than well-paved streets and adequate fire protection. Increase of leisure is a menace, not an asset to society, if it means more time released for profitless or pernicious amusement. The man untrained to use his leisure well, is as much a menace as the untrained artisan. There was much sound psychology in the old custom of making the seamen scour the anchor in preference to having them breed mutiny in the forecabin. A much sounder psychology is shown in the provision of healthful means of recreation. The ship's library has prevented many a mutiny. The army Y. M. C. A. tent has prevented desertions and lessened the business of the groggery outside the camp.

There is another side to the question. Too much reading may become a vice, and any considerable amount of reading of harmful or worthless books works positive injury. What of it? The ages are lurid with the fires of religious persecution; many a scientist has become mentally atrophied, or even insane, through unwise concentration on his specialty; leaders in business have become social menaces to entire communities. This does not prove that religion or science or business should be abolished or neglected. As no other recreation does, reading makes a man independent of his material condition, and his environment. The way to ensure good reading is to supply it freely. There is always the likelihood that individual tastes will not be suited but no movement would make progress which would wait until all were satisfied.

Nor is it necessary to deplore too much the fact that the most carefully selected library will give offence to

some sensitive souls. The New York *Herald* of August 15th, in speaking of criticisms of the New York Public Library, says:

"Two letters were received at the *Herald* office yesterday complaining of the fact that there were certain kinds of books at the institution. Within the last year probably fifty letters have been received asking how long the citizens must suffer the presence of frightful volumes within the walls of a public property. Lately the matter has appeared to near a crisis and the concensus is that the library is a blight, threat, menace and milestone. It may be necessary to torpedo it.

One of the letters of yesterday complains that Oliver Goldsmith's 'The Citizen of the World' attacked the Chinese, and on August 9 a complaint was made that the library had books which 'ran the Scotch into the ground' . . . All that remains is for a library attendant to bite a reader. It's things like that which start revolutions."

The day of the private library which is adequate for all the needs of its owner is past as completely as the day in which it was possible for the merchant to know personally all his customers, and those from whom he bought his stock. It is still possible and in every way desirable to have in one's possession the books he likes, the authors of whom he makes companions and friends. We shall never be truly an educated people until the family library, selected not for decorative purposes, or as a patent of intellectual respectability, but for frequent use, is a universal feature of our homes. There is a loss in depending entirely on borrowed books. He who owns no books and is content with the hurried calls of others' books, even from public libraries, has never truly learned the joy of reading. No man gets the most from life who does not have a small circle of friends for companionship as well as the larger circle of business or social acquaintances

which modern life makes necessary. The real reader has his private library of friends, however useful he may find his acquaintances of the public library.

In vocational lines the matter is different. The book which aids in gaining one's livelihood is a tool or a machine whose value is probably temporary and which is almost certain to end sooner or later on the literary scrap heap. It is impossible for any one but a plutocrat, or an institution to get even those of great practical value. Few physicians can afford adequate private professional libraries. The state has established law libraries in every legal center, to enable the Courts and the Bar to have access to the law. The library of a Newton or a Faraday would be insufficient for the merest tyro in any scientific pursuit to-day.

The progress of any country, as of any individual, depends on its ability to apply past experiences to present emergencies. Its safety depends on the judgment of its leaders. In a democracy where every man is a potential leader, and to some extent an actual one, national safety lies only in wide-spread common-sense, good judgment, and an intelligent appraisal of new ideas, before adopting them to the exclusion of the old. The agitator, like the pioneer, is essential but not the only essential. The axeman have labored in vain if the settlement cannot keep communications with the older towns and cities in the rear. The well-chosen library open to all on equal terms justifies the statement recently made by President Hibben to a group of librarians visiting Princeton University:

"At this time, when the whole world seems rushing on to an unknown future, you are holding fast to the great articles of the past. You are guarding the sources of knowledge. The library is to-day the only absolutely democratic institution that man possesses. If those

doors of the past did not matter we would close the doors of our libraries. If we would go forward we must take the past with us."^{*}

In New York State, as in few other places, the changing population makes it necessary to pursue without intermission the process of making citizens. The battle for democracy, for liberty without unbridled license, must be always fought to be ever won. For this conflict the State has, often with little deliberate plan, fortified herself everywhere by extending to her citizens a fair share of good books. A writer in *New York Libraries*, says:

"With 10 per cent. of the population of the whole United States, New York has about 20 per cent. of the books in the public and society libraries of the country, 24 per cent. of the circulation, 22 per cent. of the library income, 39 per cent. of the value in buildings and grounds and 38 per cent. of the total value of library endowments."[†]

This is a creditable record and one that should incite every librarian to make an even better one in the future. A glance at the lines along which the state has already shown great library development, suggests even greater developments in the same directions. The work which the State Library, the Educational Extension Division, and many local libraries, are doing to extend library privileges to all parts of the state, should be supplemented by much more work on the part of local libraries. Despite what has been done, much remains undone. It is asserted that 1,400,000 people of the state are still without reasonable library facilities; that, at the present rate of increase, it will be at least twenty years before every village of more than 500 inhabitants will have a public library and that even then a population of about

^{*} Quoted in *Dial*, July 15, 1916.

[†] *New York Libraries*, Feb., 1916, p. 60.

a million will have access to no library beyond the small one in the rural school.*

If the desired result is to be reached quickly and economically, the methods and results in all libraries receiving public money, must be as closely supervised, and as frankly criticised, as those of any other institution receiving public funds.

The higher standard of service which will result from closer inspection will of necessity bring more general public recognition of the claim of the librarian as well as the library to public support. Better service to the public must always precede public assent to better pay for better service. It must never be forgotten that we may provide stately buildings and all the card catalogues and other appliances and all the machinery of a public library and yet fail to provide the most important of all, a well equipped sympathetic and intelligent librarian. This must appeal to every one who has had occasion to make researches in a library.

It is the personal equation of the man or woman in charge of the books which counts more than all beside. At present many otherwise intelligent people consider the library an architectural feature, instead of an educational institution. There must be no further danger of the serious proposal made sometime ago by an economical official in a city of this state, who desired to discontinue the library appropriation and use the library building for the new jail, which he felt necessary for the community's welfare. The proposal, by the way, was ignominiously defeated by the protests of citizens to whom the library had been both a pleasure and a profit. The desire for handsome buildings is commendable, but not when it results in turning a cultural institution into a memorial with just enough books, and just enough service

* *New York Libraries*, May, 1916, p. 76.

to keep it from being quite unvisited and the donor's name forgotten.

Valuable as libraries already are to any one anxious for, or trained in habits of self-culture, willing as they are to cooperate with any agency for public betterment, there are many possibilities, unrealized as yet, of closer articulation with other educational forces of the state. The work of the library is often so widely scattered as to lose much force through its excessive individuality. It should be possible, without losing this great virtue of being the only really elective course extant, to modify so as to meet modern demands. The old plan of University extension which flourished for a time in connection with the libraries of the state, and which, chiefly through the efforts of Regent Sexton, now the honored Chancellor of the University, and Dr. Melvil Dewey, was the real force which gave the traveling library system its first auspicious start. In addition to the work with local clubs, organically connected courses might be planned which would serve, not as a substitute for the school, but which would bring many of the advantages of the school to thousands now unable to benefit by either secondary school or college. The library cannot do this to best advantage alone, but in any such system, whether initiated by library or by school, the library is an indispensable adjunct.*

It is the duty of the Regents, as the official custodians of all the educational interests of the state, to encourage

* "From the schoolman's standpoint, the library ought to be a sort of universal first aid station to every adult in perplexity. It seems to be naturally fitted beyond any other institution for this service. The criticism of the schoolman on the library's activities is that it has not organized this educational work with the adult so as to make it really efficient. From the standpoint of an educator, every time an individual comes into the library with a real interest and a real problem, you have a potential educational course of study or research presented. In cooperation with the efforts of the school, the library could undoubtedly develop a system of adult education which would be as adequate for the average adult at work as the college course is adequate for the young man and young woman of greater leisure." President J. H. Pinley, of the University of the State of New York, in *New York Libraries*, Nov., 1915, p. 7.

any movements that tend to make for better citizenship, and richer personal life. Measured by this test the libraries of the state richly merit such encouragement. They have added a new chapter to the honorable history of library work. They have done their work in most instances in a spirit of real service entirely out of proportion to their pecuniary reward. They have anticipated much that is best in modern education. They stand ready to aid any one to help himself. In their freedom from compulsion, and their giving to their users just as much as the user's industry and capacity enable him to get for himself they are exponents of both the freedom and the responsibility of democracy. The large measure of freedom from official restraint they enjoy in their work is due more to confidence in their integrity and efficiency than to indifference. They seem sure to develop their work still further, to be conducted even more frequently by workers as willing and efficient, as the best librarians of the present, and with even broader scope for their work. To further such ends, it seems not so much a prophecy, as a plain statement of fact to say that the Regents of the University of the State of New York will in the future show not only the same interest as in the past but more interest, and an even greater disposition, to secure for the libraries of the state, as far as possible, a greater measure of public recognition and support, and to lead the people of the state to appreciate that noble body of men and women, represented here, who oftentimes unsustained by fellowship or encouragement and far from their homes keep alight the fires of intellectual activity and research. So that the day may soon come when the great professional librarians may be appreciated at their true worth, as the peers of the great teachers, the great physicians, the great advocates of the State.



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